

## **murmurations by crappyfriday**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Established Relationship, Family Dinners, First Meetings, Fluff, M/M, Secret Relationship, boardgames

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Everyone else is present too, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-05-01

**Updated:** 2018-05-01

**Packaged:** 2022-04-22 04:43:10

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 5,365

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

An evening of food, Trivial Pursuit, and soft moments between two boys and friends.

## murmurations

Soft wisps of smoke rise into the air as Billy exhales slowly. There's a pit of anxiety in his stomach, feels like a rock has made its home in his gut. He needs to be at Steve's house in fifteen minutes so they can head to Joyce's house for their weekly dinner. No one really *knows* that Billy is coming. Just that Steve is bringing *someone*. They've been harrassing Steve for weeks, asking when they're going to meet the *lucky* girl. He knows they aren't going to expect him. Knows that never in a million years would they think that the "girl" that has Steve zoning out every ten seconds is actually *Billy*.

It's fine.

They all know Billy and Steve are friends and have been friends for some time. Billy's never purposely hung out with any of Steve's other friends but they've all gotten used to each other. At first, he didn't like Nancy or Jonathan, liked the kids even less. But Steve has a soft spot for them, so Billy learned to like them. At the beginning of their friendship, everyone had something to say about it, but Steve ignored them.

They've been officially dating for a couple months—in secret, obviously. They can't really pinpoint exactly where feelings of friendship turned to romance, but it was slow, at first. One minute they were crushing beers down at the quarry and the next, their fingertips would linger as they sat on the hood of the BMW. And sometime after that, Billy was blowing joint smoke into Steve's mouth. There was a definite adjustment period. For both of them. Steve had never kissed another dude and Billy had a slew of unresolved trauma, but they tried. God, did they *try*.

Communication was their biggest issue. Billy had a horrible habit of leading with anger, something he unfortunately picked up from his father and Steve was so passive-aggressive that he didn't even realize he was *being* passive-aggressive. But Steve has a way of calming Billy down, helping him breathe and relax, and think before acting. And Billy is so confrontational, so ready to drop down at any second, that it forces Steve to bounce right back. It's messy, but it's them. And Billy can't remember the last time he was this happy.

As soon as the cigarette is done, Billy pulls out a second and lights it. He starts the camaro and heads over to Steve's house. The bundle of nerves in his stomach don't ease, despite the fact that driving usually calms him. The roads in Indiana are nothing like the roads in California. Billy yearns for water. He wants to drive along the PCH again and smell the salt-water. Indiana is too dry and too hard.

They talk about it sometimes. California. Under the glow of the moonlight—when it's the only source of light in Steve's room—they lie in his bed and thinking about what will come next. Billy knows that Steve would love California. He thinks about the Castro District, the only place Billy has ever truly felt like he was at home. The only place where Billy has held the hand of someone he's genuinely liked where people could see. He'd love to walk down the street holding Steve's hand.

The two of them hold hands constantly. For Billy, it's anchoring, keeps his head on the earth—keeps him steady. For Steve, it's reassuring. When they hold hands, he knows Billy is not going anywhere. And he loves Billy's hands. They're so strong and beautiful. Steve plays with Billy's hands constantly, admiring the thickness and meatiness of them—the calluses from lifting weights. Steve always twists the rings on Billy's hands too. Billy wears his mother's ring on his pinky finger. A different ring on his ring finger.

Billy glances down at his empty ring finger, where it usually has a gold signet ring from his mother's father. She gave it to him years ago.

He's almost at Steve's, just two more turns, one stop sign. When he gets there, Steve is sitting on the porch steps, a casserole dish on his lap. Billy pulls into the garage. It's routine at this point. Billy will park where his car can't be seen. Just in case his father were to drive by. Doesn't want to risk him recognizing the camaro and asking questions.

As Billy is closing his door, Steve is crowding up behind him. Blanketed in the security of the garage, Billy slides his hand up to Steve's cheek and kisses him hello. He tastes like the horrible cinnamon toothpaste he buys. But Billy just smoked two cigarettes so he can't complain.

Steve pulls back. "Hi." Beautiful, big, brown eyes stare into Billy's blue.

"Hi yourself." Billy leans back against the side of the camaro, pulls Steve into him.

Steve runs his hands along Billy's forearms. "We needed to leave like ten minutes ago but I want to kiss you again."

Billy grins. "I'm not gonna stop you."

Steve leans in. Their mouths press together. Billy slides his hands up Steve's sides and is about to slip his tongue into Steve's mouth, but he pulls away. Their foreheads rest against each other. "We should go now."

The pit of anxiety subsided for a moment but it's back in full force. Billy grimaces, he can't help it. This dinner is going to be unpredictable. He doesn't like unpredictable. The only *predictable* thing about tonight is that it will be uncomfortable.

Steve cups Billy's cheek, presses a small kiss to the side of his mouth. "Please don't be nervous."

Billy took a deep breath. "I feel like I'm about to walk into the lion's den." When Steve laughs, he adds, rattled, "hey! Don't laugh at me."

"I don't think it's gonna be as bad as you think it will be," he says.

"I think it's gonna be *worse*," Billy says just to be difficult. "Not only do they not know you're bringing a dude, but that dude is *me*."

"Hey! They were the ones to assume it was a girl. You know what they say when you assume."

Billy rolls his eyes and makes a point of not answering.

Steve kisses his cheek again. "Let's go. I promise to do something real special when we get home tonight."

At that, Billy's ears perk up.

They ride in the BMW to Joyce's. They're definitely late—even Hopper's car is parked already and he's always last to show. Billy held Steve's hand in his the entire time, fiddling with the gold ring on his index. Billy's ring was too big for Steve's third finger, but it fit well on his index. Billy loves when he wears it.

The engine cuts off and Steve turns toward him. He looks nervous. "Ready?"

"As I'll ever be," Billy answers.

Steve grabs the casserole dish from the back seat. He made brownies, but there is a high chance they will taste awful because he attempted to make them from scratch instead of a box. He voices his concern to Billy as they walk up the stairs to the front door.

Billy rubs Steve's bicep. "I'm sure they'll be great. Even if they suck I'll eat at least three."

"If I didn't know any better I'd say you liked me."

Billy scoffs. "Good thing you're a putz then, isn't it?"

"Hey!" Steve pouts, juts out his bottom lip. "That was *mean* . Apologize."

Billy laughs, shakes his head. He reaches for the casserole dish and leans up to kiss Steve. "I'm so sorry, baby." Billy kisses his cheeks and then a quick kiss to his mouth. When he starts to pull back, Steve grabs his arms to keep Billy in place. That was definitely a mistake.

"I thought I heard someone out—Oh!"

Like shrapnel, they spring apart, almost dropping the casserole dish. Billy's cheeks heat up and he tries to wipe his mouth inconspicuously, but Joyce is staring him dead in the face, her mouth wide open and her eyes full of surprise.

Billy looks over and Steve isn't faring any better. He looks almost frozen. Billy elbows him in the side but he barely reacts. The three of them stand in virtual silence until Joyce smiles and widens the door.

“Come in, come in! We were just waiting for you two to come. Did you make dessert, Steve?”

He nods. “Yes—yes! I made brownies.” He thrusts the dish at her. He gestures at Billy. “This is Billy. Billy, this is Joyce, Jonathan and Will’s mother. Sort of all of our adoptive mother, really.”

Joyce smiles and it looks so warm and inviting. Billy’s seen her around town before but he’s never spoken to her. She looks like a mother—full of warmth.

“It’s really nice to meet you Billy. We’ve all been wondering who’s been keeping our Steve so busy all the time! He’s smitten, that’s for sure.”

Steve blushes. “Don’t say that, he’s gonna get a big head.”

“Is that Steve!” a voice bellows that is distinctly Dustin’s. “Get in here! We’re all starving!”

Billy winces and says, “Any last words?”

Joyce laughs and ushers them inside the door, closing it behind them. When they all enter the dining room, what was once boisterous turns completely silence upon their arrival. Dropped mouths around the entire table. Billy sees Max’s red hair and refuses to let his gaze drift to her. Too weird.

He looks at Steve, who looks like a deer in headlights.

Luckily, they had Joyce to break the ice. “Why don’t we make room for our two additions? Will, sweetie, why don’t you slide over so they can sit together.”

Billy’s not sure if some outside force takes over his body or what happened, but he somehow manages to sit down at the table. To his right Steve sits, and the seat to his left is fortunately occupied by Joyce.

No one says anything for a moment, until Dustin blurts out, “Wait, is Billy supposed to be the secret girlfriend? But Billy is a *dude* .”

“Sharp eye there, Henderson,” Billy quips.

Steve elbows him. “First of all, I never said I had a girlfriend!”

“You’ve been dating *Billy* ?” Max asks, completely bewildered.

Billy still doesn’t look her way. He notices Nancy and Jonathan across the table watching this scene play out. They don’t look that surprised, considering. The police chief—Hopper, as Steve calls him—is watching intently.

“I know this is probably coming as a shock to everyone but yes.” Steve grins, but there is an edge to it. “Wow, dinner looks amazing, Joyce. We should eat.”

No one looks like they want to drop it, but Billy sees the look Joyce is giving the table, and that spurs them to load up their plates. When the carrots get to Billy the dish is almost full still so he fills up half his plate with them. Joyce smiles at him.

Slowly, the kids begin talking and then soon enough, conversation is flowing freely between everyone. Billy stays pretty quiet. He sits and eats the food from his plate. Steve has his hand on Billy’s thigh under the table while he’s talking to Will about something. The feeling from before returns. Billy’s stomach hardens and he no longer feels like he can eat. Billy moves food around on his place and takes bites every moment.

He feels Joyce’s hand come to rest on his. Billy looks up. She’s smiling warmly.

“It really is nice to finally meet you, Billy. We’ve been asking Steve to bring you ‘round for ages.”

Steve’s hand on his thigh tightens and relaxes.

“I’m—” His throat is all garbled. He clears it. “I’m sure it wasn’t me who you were expecting.” He feels oddly vulnerable. Going into this, Billy knew he would feel uncomfortable, but with Joyce’s soft eyes staring into his, he feels vulnerable.

She tightens her hold on his hand. “It’s nice all the same.” She sounds

sincere to his ears. “You’re Max’s brother, yes?”

“Um, yeah. Step-brother.” Billy sees Max glance at his end of the table. She’s listening.

“We just love her. Keeps the boys in check, that’s for sure.”

Billy smiles. “She’s a real ball-buster.”

Joyce lets out a hearty laugh and smiles. “And you guys came all the way from California? That’s a big move.”

No one really knows the real reason why they moved to Indiana. Dad fed some half-ass story to Max about a job transfer and Billy doesn’t know if Susan knows. She doesn’t look at him too strangely. Only Billy and his father know why they left sunny, progressive California and came to wherever-the-fuck-Indiana. Dad thought for sure there would be no out gay kids here; thought that a small town would stifle Billy.

He had walked in on Billy and a friend fooling around and that was that. One “job transfer” later, and they were in Hawkins, Indiana.

“Yeah, we—uh. My dad’s job transferred him here.”

Joyce nods. “Bit of a culture shock, huh?”

“Yeah, yeah. I miss the sun. And the water. The beach.” He misses sand between his toes and salty air in his face. “But I don’t mind it here anymore. Could live without the winter, though.”

“Billy’s like a kitten, Joyce. He *loves* the sun. Stretches out in patches of sunlight and just snoozes,” Steve interjects.

Billy turns to look at him, smiling. He can’t believe Steve is just supplying her with small information about himself, but it’s nice. It’s nice that they get to do this.

~

After dinner, Steve volunteers the both of them to wash and dry the dishes. When everyone else retires to the living room to sit around



the fireplace and play board games, they clear the table and fill the sink up with soapy water and plates. Steve washes while Billy dries.

“See, that wasn’t so bad, was it?”

Billy hums. “No, I guess it wasn’t so terrible.” He bumps his hip against Steve’s. Steve bumps him right back. “Joyce is really nice. I like her.”

“She liked you too.” Steve hands him a plate. Billy wipes it with the drying cloth and sets it on the counter. “Nancy didn’t look all that surprised. I saw that she talked to you.”

“Yeah, she, uh, asked if I found the bio quiz hard,” Billy replies.

“It’s really annoying that you’re actually smart,” Steve huffs. “Not fair. No one should be smart *and* hot.”

Billy grins. He leans into Steve’s space and rests his chin on Steve’s shoulder. “Hot, huh?”

Steve elbows him. “Shut up and dry those plates.”

Billy digs his chin into Steve’s shoulder slightly. “Hey Steve?”

“What?”

“Thanks for bringing me.”

Steve turns his head and looks into Billy’s eyes. His brown eyes, big and soft. He leans his forehead against Billy’s and rests his hand on Billy’s hip. “Thanks for coming.” Steve slides his hand to the small of Billy’s back and presses him closer. He steals a small, quick kiss.

Max walks into the kitchen moments later when they’re putting the dry dishes into the cupboards. “We just set up Trivial Pursuit.” She eyes them warily. “How come you didn’t tell us before now?”

Steve sighs softly. “It’s hard, Max. We didn’t want—we need this to stay quiet. No one else can know.”

“Especially Neil, okay?” Billy says.

Max rolls her eyes. “Of course. I’m not an idiot. I know.” She turns to leave then stops. “You guys better hurry, everyone is waiting.”

When they get to the living room, the Trivial Pursuit board is set up on the carpet and everyone is sitting around it. Dustin immediately stands up and rushes to Steve.

“I picked you for my team,” he says, in lieu of an actual greeting.

“Team? Trivial Pursuit doesn’t have teams,” Steve says.

Dustin scoffs. “Right-o Steve-o. But it also has a max of six players and there’s twelve of us. We have to double up. Hence, you being on my team.”

Steve gapes. “Can’t Billy and I be a team?”

“No ‘cause I already chose Billy to be on *my* team,” Max pipes in. Billy raises his eyebrow at her. “What? I wanna win.”

Steve harrumps and pulls Billy to sit down beside him. On his left, Max is giving Billy a toothy grin as she shows off their token. It’s the red one.

Playing Trivial Pursuit with double the players ends up being absolutely trouble. Lucas and Will always bicker because neither of them say the same answer for the question. Hopper and Joyce have no competitive streak and don’t care if they get questions wrong. El and Mike get scolded when El gets a nosebleed every time someone asks them their question—like she’s *searching* for the answer. Nancy and Jonathan are just here to have fun. And Max and Dustin won’t stop heckling each other.

Billy has an oddly good memory in the sense that he remembers useless—or in the world of Trivial Pursuit, not useless—facts or bits of information. They’ve played it few times at home, back in California, when things weren’t as tenuous and harsh. Billy would always win. Susan close behind, then Dad, and lastly Max. She was young, so no one really expected her to know anything.

Dustin is getting aggravated at Steve for not knowing anything. And Max is bragging every time she and Billy answer something correctly.

“You’re being awfully boastful for someone who isn’t even *contributing to the answer*,” Billy points out after he said: “Honshu” was the largest Japanese island and Max stuck her tongue out at Dustin.

“There’s no ‘I’ in team, Billy,” she replies, dogmatically. She grins maniacally at Steve who was reading their questions. “C’mon ask us the next one!”

Billy groans and flops back on the carpet, knees bent. In desperate need of cigarette, Billy covers his eyes with his forearm. Steve wacks Billy’s legs with his hand and nudges his arm off his face. Billy opens one eye to see Steve leering down at him.

“Okay, your question is: ‘What does a heliologist study?’”

Billy grunts, says nothing.

Max nudges his legs. “Billy, c’mon, we only have thirty more seconds!” He mutters nonsense under his breath. She gets more insistent with her nudges. “Billy! Fifteen seconds!”

“Jesus, Maxine,” he chastises. “A heliologist studies the *sun* .”

Dustin slams his hands down on the carpet. Had it been hardwood floor, a table, something other than soft fabric, it might have made a noise. In this situation, it only made his hands warm. “How in the *hell* did you KNOW that!”

Billy bounces into an upright position, offended and bewildered at the same time. “Helio *literally* means sun!”

Dustin scoffs. “I know that, I didn’t think *you* would,” he clucks.

Before Billy can retort, Max claps happily and takes the corresponding wedge. “I love winning.”

“Anyone else feel like this is Max and Dustin’s game and we’re all just along for the horrible, horrible ride?” Lucas asks. And when both Max and Dustin fix him with a glare, he adds, “Fine, jeez. Was just sayin’.”

It's Nancy and Jonathan's turn next. While they play out their turn, Steve puts his hand on top of Billy's where it lays on the carpet. Doesn't hold it or move it—just puts his fingers over Billy's.

"Tonight can we watch The Breakfast Club?" he asks, quietly.

Billy narrows his eyes. "We watched that two nights ago."

"I know," Steve pouts, "But I wanna watch it again."

"You also said *I* could pick what we watched next," Billy points out. "We still haven't watched Alien."

Steve pinches Billy's middle finger. "Movie store's closed, bucko. How we gonna rent it?" He tuts. "Which is why we should watch The Breakfast Club."

Billy glances up at the ceiling. "You're such a brat." He's smiling when he says it. Steve beams and a moment later, yawns. A huge yawn that affects his whole face. "Sexy," Billy teases.

The two of them are distracted by Lucas shouting: "Will, are you *kidding*?! The photosphere is the first layer of the sun's atmosphere!"

"Fine! Then it's either the chromosphere or corona! I don't know!" Will exclaims.

Max cackles loudly.

"How do these games usually end?" Billy asks.

Steve shrugs. "Usually with one of them flipping the board and scattering the pieces."

Joyce comes into the room with Steve's dish of brownies. "How about we cool off with some dessert? Steve made us all brownies."

"Steve cooked?" Nancy asks, dubious. "Are we sure its safe?"

Steve's eyebrows knit together. "Hey! I resent that."

"I have to agree with girl-Wheeler on this one, Steve-o," Dustin butts

in.

“Cool it guys, I’m sure they’re great,” Hopper interrupts.

Despite everyone holding a brownie, no one makes any movements to eat one. Steve pouts. Billy resolves not to look anywhere near Steve’s eyes. They’re big, brown and have the capacity to make Billy do things he doesn’t want to do. He loves Steve—worships him—but Steve is not someone who should spend any quality time in the kitchen. He doesn’t like to measure things properly and often mistakes ingredients for each other.

In a moment of weakness, Billy glances at Steve who is fixing him with quite the look. He’s curved his eyebrows up and jutted out his bottom lip into a pout.

Billy swallows slowly and takes a bite. He chews for a second and his mouth is overwhelmed with the bitter taste of cocoa powder. It completely dries his mouth out, but he tries to limit his reaction. He swallows after a moment and Steve is looking up expectantly.

“Oh... wow. That is. Wow. Delicious,” he manages to say, despite his throat feeling like sandpaper.

Steve looks happy for all of two seconds before Dustin is sputtering his bite out into his hand and shouting. “Steve, what the *hell* is this shit?”

“Language!” Joyce chastises.

“I’m sorry Ms. Byers but I think Steve is trying to poison us.”

Steve bristles and narrows his eyes at Billy. “You said they were good.”

Billy grimaces. “Bab—Steve.” Billy catches himself from calling Steve “baby” in front of everyone. “I’m sorry but I think you put too much cocoa powder. How much did you put in?”

“The recipe said one to three cups!” he exclaims. “I put in two.”

Joyce gasps. “Oh honey, no.”

“You sure it didn’t say a third of a cup?”

Steve crosses his arms, affronted. Then meekly, he asks, “Were they really that bad?”

Billy softens, says, “No,” at the same time Dustin says, “Yes! Never bake again!”

~

After the brownie debacle, the Trivial Pursuit game fizzles out. The kids get distracted by their D&D campaign and retreat to the basement to play. Hopper and Joyce open a bottle of wine and go smoke out on the porch. The teens gather in Jonathan’s room to listen to records and smoke a joint. Initially, they were just going to listen to music, but Steve asked if anyone wanted to and Jonathan hopped on it. A Queen records spins softly in the background.

Nancy and Jonathan are sitting on the edge of his bed and Steve and Billy are sitting on the ledge by the opened window. She’s watching intently as Steve rolls a joint. He finishes it and lights up the end, blows out the flame.

“Remember when you sucked at rolling those?” Nancy teases when Steve hands it to her first.

“There’s only so many times *someone* can call you a square before you figure out how to do it,” Steve answers, glaring at Billy.

“What? Everyone told me you were *cool* and then I saw you roll a joint and it was a complete disaster. You are a square,” Billy says.

Steve shoves his foot into Billy’s lap, leaves it there, and relaxes. “You’re a square,” he retorts, lamely.

“So,” Jonathan starts, inhales from the joint, coughs, “How’d you two...you know.” he trails off and hands Billy the joint.

Billy takes a pull, holds the smoke in his lungs, and exhales slowly out the window.

Steve answers after a second, “Well, as you know, Billy was obsessed

with me and—”

Billy’s jaw drops. “I was *not* .”

Steve pats his leg to placate him. “Don’t try to hide it. *Anyways* , as I was saying, Billy was obsessed with me. He made the first move.”

“I did not.”

“Yes you did. *You* were the one to suggest shotgunning.”

Billy grunts. “Because you’re fucking oblivious,” he mutters. He takes another pull and passes it to Steve.

As Steve holds in the drag, he croaks motioning at both Nancy and Jonathan, “So, you two didn’t seem all that shocked before at dinner. Not surprising I’m a big ol’ queer?”

Jonathan snickers. “You, with those pastel polos? Not so much. Hargrove, however. Sort of surprising at first but then I thought it about it and it made sense. No one is that confident with girls unless they truly don’t give a shit how it ends out.”

Billy can’t fault him for that. It’s true.

“Plus,” Nancy says, “We sort of picked up on something between the two of you.”

“Is it super obvious?”

Nancy shakes her head. “No, not really. I just know what you look like when you’re looking at someone you like.”

They pass around the joint, chatting aimlessly, until it’s finished. Steve ends up with lying down with his head resting on Billy’s thigh. Billy sits back and lets the three of them chat and he closes his eyes, tired. Steve’s cheek is mashed against his thigh and Billy can feel his breaths. Billy listens absently to Nancy and Jonathan recount almost getting caught hooking up under the bleachers at school by some eighth graders. Billy feels Steve’s quiet laughter.

“My mom almost caught us a couple weeks ago,” Steve says. Billy

groans, remembering.

“No,” Nancy gasps, “what happened?”

“She never told me they were coming back from Florida so soon. So, like—when they’re gone we kind of just do whatever wherever,” he explains. “We were just in the basement *watching tv* and all of a sudden I hear the basement door open and Billy heard it too and he reacted *very* poorly and I started choking and we were trying to get dressed because my mom was walking down the stairs! It was mortifying.”

“Jesus.”

“Yeah, I know. She didn’t see anything fortunately. But like... wow, it was close.”

“Is that the first time you met Mrs. Harrington, Billy?” Nancy asks. “She’s so intimidating. Think she hated me.”

“Uh, no. I first met her like two months ago?” he answers. “She’s nice.”

“Mom *loves* Billy. It’s super annoying.”

Billy grins wolfishly. “What can I say, moms love me.”

“Every time she calls me she asks after Billy. Asks him over for dinner too. Dad likes him too—he thinks he’s a good influence on me.”

“No offense, but have they *met* him?” Nancy asks, incredulously.

Steve scoffs. “You should have seen him. He buttoned his shirt up, called my parents ma’am and sir, and when dad asked him about colleges, he had *answers* .”

“You going to college then?” She directs the question towards Billy.

“Yeah, probably, if I get some scholarships.”

“You got over 1400 on the SATs, you’re getting scholarships,” Steve comments.



"1400?" Nancy's jaw drops. "That's really, really good. Where have you applied?"

"Buncha schools in Cali," Billy says. "Can't stand this east coast weather. You?"

"Mostly schools nearby. University of Chicago—Jon applied to the Art Institute there—and NYU are my top picks." She pauses. "Steve, you still not applying anywhere?"

He groans. "Do I look like college material? Definitely not."

Billy and Steve have talked a few times about life after high school. Steve knows that Billy isn't going to be staying around long after graduation and he's definitely getting into a school in California. Steve will probably end up following Billy to west coast and getting a job so he can figure out what he wants to do with his life. He definitely won't find it in Hawkin's, that's for sure.

"I always thought that if you really put your mind to it, you could get into a decent school and just take random courses," Nancy offers.

"I feel like it's a waste of money. I mean, not everyone has to go to college. Dad'll be upset but what else is new?" Steve sighs.

Someone knocks on the door and interrupts them. It's Max and Dustin. They stand in the doorway with their backpacks in hand. Steve sits up, figuring it's time to drive the kids home.

"Billy, Neil wanted me home at ten. Can you take me so Joyce doesn't have to?" Max asks.

He stands up, pats his pockets for his eyes, before he realizes they took the BMW. Billy turns to Steve. "You drove."

Steve stands up. "Yeah, lets go. Dustin, you too?"

"Yeah, mom wants me home tonight."

"Alright. Let's say goodbye to Joyce and Hopper before we leave," Steve says, turns to Nancy and Jonathan. "You guys should come over tomorrow. Supposed to be like twenty degrees, we were gonna

sit out by the pool.”

Nancy beams. “Steve, that sounds amazing. We’ll definitely be there.” She gets up and hugs him. And then hugs Billy. “See you guys tomorrow, then.”

~

In the car, once they’ve dropped off Dustin and are on their way to the Hargrove household, Steve reaches for Billy’s hand. Over the center console, their hands rest, joined together. Max sits in the backseat regaling both of them with stories from the D&D campaign. Steve stops at the house just before Billy’s. They idle in the car for a moment.

“If Neil asks...” Billy trails off.

Max nods, a look of understanding in her eyes. “I haven’t seen you. Joyce gave me a ride home.” She pauses. “He hasn’t asked about you. Sorry.”

Billy laughs but it’s tense and pained. “It’s fine.” It’s not fine, but it’s his life. Most of his stuff is at Steve’s. He really only goes home if Steve’s parents are in town, but even then, they don’t mind if he sleeps in the guest room. “Just tell him, uh. Actually, nevermind. See you later, Maxine.”

“Bye Billy, bye Steve.”

She climbs out the car, walks to the Hargrove front door, and disappears inside. Dad’s car is parked in the driveway, so Billy’s glad they parked a house away just in case he sees out the window. Steve rubs his thumb over Billy’s hand. The two of them sit in comfortable silence, the only sound coming from the radio. At Steve’s house, Billy grabs the dish of disaster brownies from the floor and they head inside.

Steve switches on the kitchen lights and grabs two beers from the fridge before the two of them head to the back patio. Billy sits on the highest step with Steve sitting on the one below in front of him.

Lighting up a cigarette, Billy says, “Tonight was nice.”

“Yeah it was.”

Steve leans back in Billy’s warmth, turns his head to look up at him. His face is soft—lit up only by the sun setting on the horizon, making his skin gold. Steve rubs his hands on Billy’s thighs, slips them up to his torso where a red shirt is buttoned up almost to his neck. Starting at the top button, Steve slowly unbuttons Billy’s shirt until it hangs open. Billy’s skin holds onto warmth despite Hawkin’s not being the sunniest place. Steve peppers a few small kisses to Billy’s abdomen and then rests his cheek against his chest. Billy runs so warm and Steve is always so cold. It’s the perfect balance.

“Pass me the cigarette, please.”

Billy hands Steve the cigarette and he takes a pull. With his other hand he reaches for the hand Billy doesn’t smoke with. Steve links their fingers together and settles them on Billy’s thigh. Billy’s hands are strong in his—warm.

The two of them sit on the patio steps until the sun sets entirely before going inside to watch *The Breakfast Club* for the second time that week.

### **Author's Note:**

pls Comment if u like it! come talk to me on my  
tumblr @softloucre: send me prompts if u'd like:-)

hope u enjoyed <3

i even looked up sample trivia questions from the  
game in the 80s. i did my #research

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